

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

May 4, 2020

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

We write to express our deep concern about the safety of the vulnerable Sikh religious minority in Afghanistan, which continues to be under grave threat from Islamic State terrorist attacks directed at Sikhs. As you know, on March 25, Islamic State terrorists attacked a Sikh gurdwara (house of worship) in Kabul, killing 25 people, including a four-year old girl. A second attack targeted the funeral for those killed at the gurdwara, compounding the tragedy and highlighting that the threat against this community remains profound.

Once a thriving community of nearly 250,000 people, the Sikh and Hindu community in Afghanistan has endured years of discrimination and violence from extremists, and the community is now estimated to comprise fewer than 100 families across the country. The immediate threat to the Sikh religious minority in Afghanistan from the Islamic State remains severe, and much of the community is now seeking relocation outside of Afghanistan for their safety.

Throughout your tenure as Secretary of State, you have consistently touted the importance of religious freedom as a fundamental principle. Two months ago, you marked the establishment of an International Religious Freedom Alliance, a group of like-minded countries committed to advancing religious freedom and “predicated on the idea that more must be done to protect members of religious minority groups.”

Mr. Secretary, more must be done to protect the vulnerable Sikh and Hindu religious minorities in Afghanistan. We recognize that travel restrictions resulting from the global outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) have led to the temporary suspension of admissions for most refugees. However, the situation is urgent for Afghan Sikhs and Hindus. This community already faces existential danger in Afghanistan, and the severity of that threat is only likely to increase in the weeks and months to come.

As such, we urge you to take all available steps to facilitate the safe and expeditious relocation of members of the Sikh and Hindu religious minorities in Afghanistan. In particular, we strongly recommend that you consider referring these vulnerable individuals to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) through Priority 1 embassy referrals.

We understand that such referrals to the USRAP are generally used in small numbers and situations of extreme danger, but we believe this situation is extremely grave and urge you to expand the use of this measure to save Afghan Sikhs and Hindus. We also urge you to reallocate current refugee admissions priorities based on global needs to allow for Afghan Sikhs and Hindus to come to the United States this fiscal year.

We strongly encourage you to engage the other member countries in the International Religious Freedom Alliance to secure their support and involvement in helping to protect and safely relocate this vulnerable religious minority community from Afghanistan.

The protection of religious freedom is one of principles on which the International Religious Freedom Alliance was founded, and now is the time to demonstrate the administration's commitment to that principle by leading this alliance in coordinated, multilateral action to protect an endangered religious minority community.

Sincerely,



John Garamendi
Member of Congress

/s/

TJ Cox
Member of Congress

/s/

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

/s/

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

/s/
Henry C. “Hank” Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/
Haley M. Stevens
Member of Congress

/s/
Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress

/s/
Paul Cook
Member of Congress

/s/
Jim Costa
Member of Congress

/s/
Abigail D. Spanberger
Member of Congress

/s/
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

/s/
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

/s/
Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

/s/
Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

/s/
Brad Sherman
Member of Congress

/s/
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

/s/
Judy Chu
Member of Congress

/s/
Josh Harder
Member of Congress

/s/
Andy Levin
Member of Congress

/s/
Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

/s/
Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress

/s/
Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress

/s/
André Carson
Member of Congress

/s/
Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress

/s/
Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress